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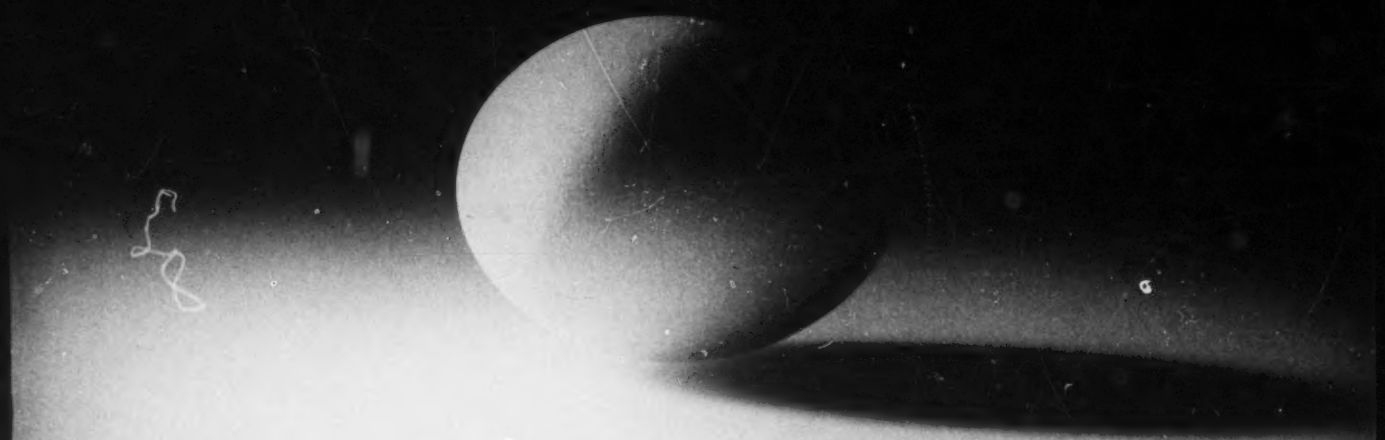
ARE GOOD SALESPEOPLE BORN OR MADE?

For the answer, see page 74



COMPENSATION
Don't Be
Too Quick
On the Draw

TECHNOLOGY
Should You
Pick Up On
Car Phones Now?

SALESMANSHIP
So You Think
You Have
A Tough Sell?

SEPTEMBER 1988
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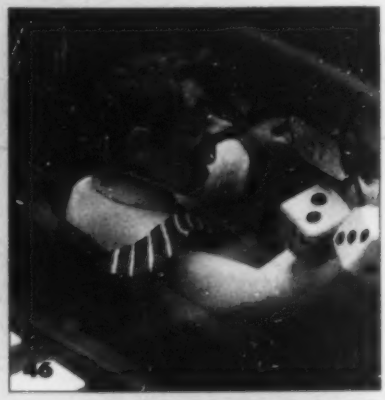
SALES & MARKETING MANAGEMENT



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EDITOR'S SIDE POCKET

LET'S CUT THE POWER

Leafing through a prominent business magazine (the only kind I read) recently, I came across a story about achieving "a power look in the postcrash era." A few pages later, another article, this one on hi-tech office equipment, was called—wouldn't you know?—"Power Tools." Later on, this same magazine referred to itself as belonging to something called "The Metro Power Group." Opening the next magazine on my pile, the first page I encountered contained a department called "Power Resumé."

Now, let's hold it right there. Magazine editors are supposed to be sharp cookies, with a sense of irony and an ear for clichés. But here, it would appear, their sense is benumbed and their ears have failed them. Not that editors are the only culprits. As I mentioned to you in a previous "Side Pocket," a few months ago an ad agency invited me to a "power breakfast," where we were regaled by the former power madam of a bevy of power prostitutes. What was once somewhat descriptive and slightly amusing—employing *power* as an adjective—has become more than somewhat hokey and flat as yesterday's spritzer (which, in case you didn't know, is also yesterday's fashion).

Other words are suffering the same fate—*player*, for instance, as in "another player in the takeover attempt" or "a key player in the deal." Does this usage stem from the current view that business is akin to a game or theatrics? Sometimes, if one really works at it, it's possible to push several hot buttons at the same time. Not very long ago, in a publication for public relations-types, I saw an article titled "Power Lines," and it began "Institutional investors have become bigger players in the corporate sphere. . . . " Artful, huh?

Still another locution to give one pause: *enhance*, as in "to enhance sales performance." Nowadays, to say you're *increasing* (even, God forbid, *boosting)* sales performance reveals you are not with it, even though you may be wearing a power suit at the power lunch at the power restaurant where you do enhanced deals with other players who are nothing if not major, big, or principal.

By this time I hope you take my point, which is that simple is better and straight talk is best. And for a splendid example of same, let me refer to the title of our main cover story for this issue. Is there a better way to ask that question? I don't think so. It cuts through the bull to get to the heart of the matter. The question is not new, of course; it has intrigued generations of managers. Even though selling has changed a lot and neologisms like customer relations counselor, account consultant, even problem-solver (gosh, some more expressions to avoid) are used to describe the salesperson, I would've guessed that many more executives would have believed that the personality characteristics that make up a successful salesperson, if not the ability to sell itself, are innate; that training will take a salesperson to a certain point, but past that point it's out of the manager's hands. My view is apparently that of the minority. For an examination of this and other questions about sales and selling, turn to page 74.

SALES & MARKETING MANAGEMENT

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ARE GOOD SALESPEOPLE BORN OR MADE?

We ask top executives and consultants and get some surprising answers to this and other sticky questions about hiring.

BY ARTHUR BRAGG, SENIOR EDITOR

Stable, self-sufficient, self-confident, goal-directed, decisive, intellectually curious, speedy, accurate—these are some of the character traits that a major testing company ascribes to top salespeople.

How many of these traits can be trained into a salesperson or absorbed in the course of work? Apparently most of them. That's the conclusion to be drawn from a recent survey sponsored by this magazine of 10,000 sales and marketing executives in a total of 10 major industries. By a margin of at least seven to one, the executives maintained that good salesmen are made, not born. At the same time, many of these executives (and sales trainers, too) described men and women they knew as being "a born salesman."

There appeared to be similar contradictions (or at least inconsistencies) in their answers to other questions in our survey, which was conducted for us by Simmons Market Research Bureau. Among the questions we asked:

- Are the best salespeople self-motivators or do they need to be motivated like everyone else?
- What best predicts a new salesperson's eventual performance?
- Does raiding the competition for new hires pay off? How?
- How long should it take for a new salesperson to become productive?
- How much should it cost to train a new salesperson to sell your product line?

Even though most of the respondents to our survey seemed to believe that "training makes the salesman," a strong and vocal minority disagreed.

"There are essential ingredients in selling out of reach of trainers," says Paul D. Witherby, vice president of Selection Research, a Lincoln, NB, recruiting consulting firm. "Can they teach ego, train it into an individual? Can they teach personal drive or persistence that gets the sale? Hardly. The best salespeople acquired what it takes to excel when they were kids at play on a baseball diamond or football field. Training won't do it. Yet a lot of companies try and waste a lot of money in the process."

Alan E. Hodgins, who's in charge of sales training and business development at Tuco Products, Orangeville, Canada, also believes in born salespeople. But talk with him and he adds some important conditions. "A good salesman always has built-in qualities, such as an extroverted personality." He pauses. "But he'll still need to acquire a lot of skills if he's to make it in today's market. The most important one is the ability to match his products with his customer's needs. *That* has to be taught."

Another believer in born sellers is Stewart Washburn (an excerpt from his new book appears in this issue, starting on page 118). But he also refuses to commit totally. "I know 'born' salespeople—individuals blessed with a pleasant personality or, to put it simply, the gift of gab. But even they have had the benefit of other things taught, or acquired, along the way. I personally think that among the latter, the most beneficial is to have a damn good sales manager."

In the "born" versus "made" issue, consultants tend to be card-carrying members of the latter camp—to no one's surprise. Among the most dedicated is Clay Garner, vice president of H.R. Chally Group, a Dayton, OH-based company that specializes in assessing and hiring sales forces:

"Research that we've done shows that experience, education, and practice are the essentials to becoming a productive salesperson, and they're not characteristics people are born with. The whole 'born' versus 'made' argument assumes that there is a single or universal salesperson, but we recognize different kinds. A consultant-type, for example, who must come up with individually designed solutions, is different from a 'relationship' salesman, who provides products to companies where the customer is the expert.

"There are some great salespeople who were born that way," Garner continues. "But there are many more who through education and practice have be-

come great." Asked to define greatness, Garner says, "Foremost, it's understanding the needs of each customer. And after recognizing each client's needs, matching them with the appropriate selling approach. A great salesperson is always a master of finding the right selling style to use each time."

While Garner sees a top performer as a chameleon, Selection Research's Witherby likens him or her to a lap cat. "A star salesperson," he argues, "is sensitive to the other person's situation. He knows how to get inside it." Some individuals, he explains, are born with that ability. "But if it's not there, it's something I believe we can train into a person."

SELF-MOTIVATION, BAH

The respondents were almost as negative about self-motivation as they were about born salespeople. We asked executives whether or not they agreed with the statement, "Good salespeople don't need to be motivated; they motivate themselves." The vote ran two-to-one against in every industry surveyed except textiles, where the vote was virtually evenly split.

Those who view motivation as a fire that needs to be set and fanned by management have an ally in consultant Stewart Washburn. The most effective motivator, he declares, is field supervision, particularly coaching salespeople. "The ideal," Washburn says, "is one full-time supervisor, someone with no direct account responsibility, for every eight to ten full-time salespeople." He adds that if the product is complicated or if it carries a high price, "five or six salespeople are plenty" for each supervisor to monitor.

La Jolla, CA-based sales consultant Tony Alessandra tells his clients that motivation should come from what he calls "career interviews." The goal: "to help the salesperson grow but not to assess his past performance." The latter mission, he says, should be undertaken only at formal performance appraisals. No surprise, then, that Alessandra suggests the best site for a career interview is a restaurant, with good food to make the going all the more friendly for both sides.

What It Costs to Train a Sales Recruit

	TEXTILES	GLASS & BUILDING MATERIALS	PUBLISHING & PRINTING	METAL MANUFACTURING	TELECOMMUNICATIONS	DIVERSIFIED FINANCIAL SERVICES	RUBBER PRODUCTS	TRANSPORTATION SERVICES	SOAPS & COSMETICS	ELECTRONICS
Under $5,000	32%	28%	39%	32%	33%	31%	32%	40%	36%	17%
$5,000–$9,999	23	24	35	28	37	31	37	32	36	33
$10,000–$19,999	29	23	10	18	19	11	17	18	17	27
$20,000 or More	14	24	10	18	12	19	11	7	9	23
Don't Know/No Answer	2	1	5	4	—	5	3	3	3	—

Length of Time Before a New Salesperson Is Productive

1 Month	—	5	9	5	—	8	7	6	4	3
3 Months	14	23	32	23	31	22	27	38	20	18
6 Months	45	32	30	42	50	42	37	39	46	51
1 Year	25	25	17	16	16	12	24	10	26	16
More Than One Year	11	9	9	13	2	12	4	5	4	11
Don't Know/No Answer	4	6	3	1	—	3	1	2	—	1

Use of Psychological or Intelligence Tests In Hiring Salespeople

Use Tests	16	21	21	18	17	30	12	17	17	15
Don't Use Tests	79	76	76	78	83	67	87	82	82	84
Don't Know/No Answer	4	2	3	4	—	3	1	1	1	1

Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Bill Tredwell (l.): Some march to their own drummer. Rich Nelson(r.): Divorced women? Yes. Divorced men? No.

A career interview, he explains, should clear the air, and the salesperson should be encouraged to do most of the airing. Alessandra says the sales manager should come away knowing what the salesperson likes and dislikes about his current job, how he thinks he can improve in the next 30 days, where he would like to be in the company a year hence, who at the company he is having trouble with and why, and what he is doing, precisely, to grow, either through self-study programs or some other approach. Ask these questions of *all* salespersons, advises Alessandra. "Don't think the veterans will find the career interview beneath them."

Management consultant William Tredwell of Boston-based McBer and Company points out that some salespeople march to their own motivational drummer. He fondly recalls a highly successful saleswoman at Mary Kay, the cosmetics direct-selling franchisor. She won the chance to interview for a job selling for a company whose interviewers were very Waspy, big on wing tips and white shirts.

"So, in walks this girl," says Tredwell, "garlanded with cheap jewelry, a Long Island accent, and a miniskirt. Ordinarily, they would have ushered her out as fast as they could. But then she described how she had finagled her way into a job with a Mary Kay franchise, although she was still in college, and how much money she'd made. By the end of the interview, all these middle-aged guys were leaning over, dying to hire her. They said, 'She's an achiever, we'll hire her and change her image.' "

San Francisco State Univ. marketing professor Rich Nelson also believes that there are some people who have the gift of self-motivation, and he has advice on where to look for them.

"Try divorced women," he says. "They're the newest—and best—source of marketing talent. They're hard workers, stable, and dedicated." (Keep in mind, however, that there are legal proscriptions against asking a job applicant if he or she is divorced.)

Nelson warns against expecting that a divorced man will be similarly motivated, especially if he has just gone through a divorce. "He tends to be highly upset, emotional, and concerned about finances, and all these factors take their toll on performance."

Nelson also challenges the view that blacks and other minorities don't have the potential to become sales force stars. "There is evidence that blacks can attain the heights," Nelson notes. Indeed, Nelson says, minorities are a good source of sales recruits because, perhaps more than others, they view selling as a quick path to a middle-class income and success. "But they need to realize that selling means failing time after time, being constantly rejected." He warns that minorities need to be made aware that "selling is one of the few professions where a successful individual also may fail eight out of ten times."

The best source of sales stardom: the daughters of successful business executives.

WHAT PREDICTS SUCCESS

If you were asked what is most predictive of a salesperson's success, you might very well answer *experience*. And if you did, you'd be in agreement with nearly half of the managers who responded to our survey. You'd also be in congruence with them if you rated the personal interview as being next in importance in deciding whether or not to make the hire.

Do managers know something that researchers and other experts don't, or are they just following tradition and gut instincts—and damn what experts say? Academic studies of predictors of performance rate experience and the personal interview rather low in their ability to predict on-the-job performance. On the other hand, what the experts feel is the best predictor of performance—psychological and intelligence tests—is rated negligibly by the respondents to our survey. Only 4% believe these tests are predictive of a salesperson's performance. Interestingly, however, many more of these same managers use psychological and ability tests in their hiring. Is it that corporate policy compels them to use the tests, even though the managers themselves think them of little worth? Among the industries leading the pack in the use of such tests: diversified financial services, 30%; glass and building materials, 21%; and publishing and printing, also 21%.

"Psychological tests are decidely helpful—but the manager has got to be extremely careful about them," says

PHOTOGRAPH TOP LEFT BY E. MALITSKY, TOP RIGHT BY SHARON HALL

Beware Raiders!

When this publication recently began looking into the reasons why top sales performers signed on with their present companies, many of their managers declined to identify them by name or territory. Said one such executive, "That would be an invitation to headhunters or the competition to come in and steal our best people away from us."

Their fear is well-founded. Sixty-eight percent of the executives who responded to our survey admitted that the first place they look for new sales blood is their competition.

Widespread though it is, are companies raiding for the right reasons? "Not if they're raiding to get recruits because they have strong product knowledge," declares Lester L. Tobias, a partner in Nordli, Wilson Associates, a management psychology firm in Westborough, MA.

"They should be looking for individuals who have outstanding selling skills. It takes a lot longer to train salesmanship into someone than it does to teach him product knowledge. Look for the guy whose has the 'selling stuff' to begin with. Someone who is perceptive, intuitive, persuasive. I knew of a meat company that hired only butchers as salespeople. Management believed only someone who knew meat could sell meat. Well, a few of the butchers happened to be able to sell. As for the majority, the training they got didn't help very much. They were still more butcher than salesman.

"Savvy companies are realizing that hiring people with the ability to sell, whatever the product is, is more productive than having a technical background. This will lead to the emergence of a sizable class of truly professional sellers."

Still, the prevailing belief is that related selling experience is a definite plus. Case in point: Information Systems of America, which sells financial-applications software. Georgia L. Roberts, the firm's manager for marketing services, says that all eight of the company's current salespeople had a background that enabled them to master selling the company's product line "quickly"—actually within six months, she says.

Roberts adds that because her company hires the way it does, her sales training budget is kept low. "Training those eight salespeople," she says, "cost us a total of about $24,000. Just $3,000 per person, and a major part of that $3,000 never found its way into the training classroom at all. Instead, it was spent getting the new person to and from Atlanta for the training. When they review training costs, few managements consider the bite travel and related expenses take out of their trainers' budgets."

We Asked Executives . . .

The survey on which this article is based was conducted for *Sales & Marketing Management* by Simmons Market Research Bureau, which sent questionnaires to 10,000 executives in a total of 10 major industries: Diversified Financial Services, Electronics, Glass and Building Materials, Metal Manufacturing, Publishing and Printing, Rubber Products, Soaps and Cosmetics, Telecommunications, Textiles, and Transportation Services. The response rate was about 20% for each of the industries surveyed.

Michael Wynne, who heads International Management Consulting Associates, Naperville, IL. "Too many managers use the tests as a cop-out. When they can't decide about the candidate, how he tested becomes the major criterion for deciding whether to hire or not. And then there's the tendency to use them to cover yourself when the guy doesn't work out—you made the decision to hire, the guy's a disappointment, and so you blame the test. 'It just didn't alert us sufficiently about him' is the refrain. That's exactly what the tests are designed to do, so the excuse doesn't ring true. But you hear the excuse just the same.

"I'm particularly in favor of tests when the candidate is young, just entering selling," he adds. "There's not much to go on, so the tests can help a manager find necessary input about such candidates."

Alcoa recruiters are among those who require a candidate to take a sales aptitude test, but, says Dan Heindel, a regional sales manager at Alcoa's Sheet and Plate Div., based in Dallas, test results aren't considered until the decision to hire has actually been made. If the results cast the individual in a negative light, the recruiters discuss this development, but in no case, Heindel maintains, do they allow the test to dominate their final judgment.

Alcoa recruiters also segment hiring interviews. One member of its team will concentrate on the candidate's school years, another on any part-time job experience he may have, still another on goals he has set for himself if hired. Heindel says this structure produces better information. One reason: The individual is more alert throughout the process because he's asked to give answers only once, not again and again, as is the case when each interviewer wants to hear an applicant's entire story.

Alcoa's interviewers, Heindel says, are forever on the lookout for replies to questions that may suggest that the person on the other side of the interviewing table has the makings of greatness. But, he adds, not much time is spent looking for folks literally born to sell; rather, Alcoa's interviewing team looks for potential.

Heindel's best current source for that special breed who have the potential for stardom? The daughters of successful business executives. "When you talk about having inborn tendencies to succeed in sales, in my experience no one beats them."

Maybe there's something to being a born salesperson at that. □

PCs ARE PAYING OFF, BUT...

Sure, their sales forces are selling more with PCs; still, marketers are wary about expansion. There are some good reasons for their caution—and some not so good.

BY THAYER C. TAYLOR,
SENIOR EDITOR

The basic question of whether to bring PCs into the sales area has been decided by a strong "yes" vote. The computer issues marketers wrestle with now are in the implementation area—the rate at which to proceed, the time and cost of training, and whether to go the desktop or portable route.

Such is the overall pattern that emerges from *Sales & Marketing Management*'s second annual PC survey in which marketers, with an aggregate total of more than 20,000 sales representatives, replied to our postcard questionnaire. Major findings:

- Marketers who have crossed their Rubicon into sales force automation report overwhelmingly that the move pays off in improved sales productivity.
- While sales and marketing executives are broadly convinced sales force automation is necessary, they're not plunging ahead in a bandwagon rush. Only one-third of survey respondents who have put PCs in the hands of sales representatives have outfitted their entire sales force. In fact, 29% of the sales representatives in these firms have direct access to their own PCs; the balance use them on a shared basis or not at all.
- The primary reasons why marketers are proceeding cautiously are the time and cost of training, sales personnel-related factors, cost of hardware and software, and top management indecision.
- The most widely used PC applications reflect major salesperson and sales management concerns. The number one application, for the second straight year, is customer/prospect profiles, which give the representative a stronger knowledge base for account management. Lead management programs jumped from sixth to second place in the latest survey, underscoring management's determination to make sure sales representatives don't miss any business opportunities.
- Despite significant gains for PCs in the sales area, there remains a hard core of naysayers. Costs, by far, are the major deterrent, followed by lack of knowledge and no perceived need. The holdouts are evenly split as to whether they'll experiment with sales force automation in the near future.

BOTTOM-LINE BENEFITS

Productivity gains are roughly similar among sales forces of all sizes (see Table 1). Just as important is that companies reported productivity gains discernibly above last year's comparative 71%. Thus, an increasing number of marketers are profiting from greater sales representative productivity. But the sources of these productivity improvements are equally important.

More effective management of sales leads and better follow-through on customer contacts were cited as the PC's two biggest contributions. "Computerization gives us a permanent lead file as opposed to leads on paper," says the area manager of a telecommunications outfit. "The PC enables you to track leads more systematically," adds the sales vice president of an electronics firm. "More efficient transfer of leads to new reps" is cited by the marketing manager of a maker of displays.

The PC also appears to improve customer relations, which are enhanced by more effective follow-ups. "This leads to more closes on calls," says an insurance firm's district manager.

Better organization of selling activities is the third most frequently mentioned source of productivity gains. This leads to "the rep having better sales direction," according to the president of a health products concern. The owner of a services firm feels "the PC helps the rep keep track of everything."

More efficient account control and better time and territory management were tied as the fourth most cited sources. "Account profiles and record-keeping are improved by the PC," observes a software firm's regional manager, which in turn leads to "more awareness of the status of each account," according to the president of an electronics firm. And, when you organize your time, "you end up with more time for customer contacts," claims the district manager of a telephone products company.

Greater call activity, timely reports, more effective proposals, and more persuasive presentations were other frequently cited sources. "There's a definite increase in the number and quality of calls," says a consulting firm's president. The regional sales manager of a computer services firm points to "faster speed and improved accuracy when it comes to preparing proposals."

SUPPORT IS SLOW—BUT STEADY

If PCs have established a strong beachhead in sales offices, managers will expand that foothold cautiously. One reason why only one-third of the respondents have outfitted their entire sales forces with PCs is that in many companies sales executives installed PCs in limited numbers out of their own budgets, hoping to build a case of documented benefits that would convince top management to support and fund a broader program. A second reason: Many companies feel that not every salesperson needs to have his own machine, that just as much can be gained by having representatives in a branch office share PCs. Then, too, many companies are in a pilot test mode, testing PCs with a limited number of representatives in selected territories.

Not surprisingly, given the costs involved, the larger the sales force, the less likely it will be 100% PC-equipped. Over one-half of smaller-size marketers have given PCs to all their representatives. The proportion dips to one-third among medium-size marketers and just above one-quarter among

ILLUSTRATION MIN JAE HONG

larger-size marketers.

Time and cost of training, personnel-related issues, costs, and management indecision are the major concerns on sales managers' minds as they weigh moving deeper into automation. "The learning curve of PC software" worries the owner of a life-support systems company. "The lost selling time due to training" is on the mind of the president of a medical products maker. Observes the marketing vice president of a financial services firm, "The reps seem to slack off on call reports when they're mixing classroom time and field selling."

Because the PC is the first major new technology in the sales area since the invention of the telephone, marketers are concerned over the interaction between machine and salesperson. "The PC's acceptance as a tool" is a key issue, stresses the national sales manager of a machinery manufacturer, echoing the feelings of other sales managers.

"Overcoming poor document-keeping habits" will be a critical test, posits the area sales manager of a hi-tech products marketer. "Too many people," says the northwest sales manager of an accessories outfit, "cop-out with the cliché: 'It doesn't pertain to my industry.' " The national sales manager of a consumer goods manufacturer hopes "the PC won't distract reps from paying attention to polishing their personal selling skills."

Costs are the third most prevalent reason for caution. The district manager of a paging equipment maker insists that, despite the PC industry's intense price competition, "hardware costs are still too expensive."

Time-oriented questions are the fourth most prevalent conundrum perplexing marketers. "The time incurred to change the mode of operation" is a worrisome factor to the senior vice president of an information systems company, as is "the time it takes to load and maintain files" that dwells on the mind of the sales and marketing vice president of a services concern. Other respondents point to lost selling time during start-up and when entering data.

Unconvinced bosses are the next most cited braking factor. "Management is not providing any direction," complains the zone manager of a maker of measuring instruments, whose experience is not uncommon. The North American sales manager of a hi-tech products outfit faults management for "being too subjective when it comes to assessing costs versus benefits." A packaged goods manufacturer's regional sales manager frets that "upper management is unsure as to how the project should be funded."

If marketers debate the pace at which they want to push sales force automation, they're bent on making the most of their PC investments.

By far the most widely used application remains customer profiles, mostly because they enhance account control (see Table 2). "The PC gives the rep instant availability to the customer's complete history," says the regional sales manager of a company specializing in equipment repairs, leading to "better quality, more knowledgeable sales calls," the president of a consulting firm emphasizes.

Lead tracking programs represented the most significant shift in applications, climbing from sixth to second place among the 10 program types in our questionnaire. One big reason: Electronic leads give management stronger control over making sure leads passed to sales branches are followed up compared to previous manual methods. One marketer reports that as a result of computerization the proportion of leads sales representatives didn't pursue has been slashed "from around 80% to less than 10%." "At the end of each week," he explains, "field reps must send back to the branch office diskettes that contain information on the disposition of the leads they received. Any lead that isn't pursued within two weeks is flagged and triggers a 'why not' call from the branch manager."

Lead management software not only helps the representative do a better job of planning and organizing lead management activities, it also "delivers better qualified leads," says the owner of a health care concern.

TABLE 1

Hefty gains in productivity

SALES FORCE SIZE	PRODUCTIVITY GAIN			
	YES	NO	UNKNOWN	MEDIAN
SMALL (UNDER 10)	78.5%	16.5%	5.1%	20%
MEDIUM (10–99)	77.9	11.8	10.3	15
LARGE (100 OR MORE)	75.0	17.9	7.1	20
TOTAL	77.7%	14.9%	7.4%	15%

TABLE 2

PC applications stress customer focus

	SALES FORCE SIZE			
	ALL COMPANIES	UNDER 10	10–99	100 OR MORE
Customer/prospect profile	58%	62%	52%	66%
Lead tracking	48	53	46	36
Call reports	41	40	41	46
Sales forecasts	36	39	33	36
Sales analysis	36	40	29	46
Sales presentations	35	32	34	43
Time/territory management	34	26	36	53
Order entry	16	17	10	30
Travel & expense reports	14	9	18	17
Checking inventory/shipping status	13	14	9	23

TABLE 3

Portables gather momentum

DESKTOPS BENEFIT FROM HEAD START . . .

	% USAGE AMONG COMPANIES WITH PCS BY SALES FORCE SIZE			
	ALL COMPANIES	UNDER 10	10–99	100 OR MORE
Desktop	73.4%	80.2%	70.6%	60.7%
Laptop	9.0	6.2	11.8	10.7
Desktop & laptop	16.9	13.6	16.2	28.6
Hand-held terminal	0.6	0.0	1.5	0.0

. . . BUT LAPTOPS LOOM LARGE IN BUYING PLANS

BUYING PLANS FOR 1988					
COMPANIES WITH PCS			COMPANIES WITHOUT PCS		
YES	NO	UNDECIDED	YES	NO	UNDECIDED
62.2%	26.8%	11.0%	45.0%	47.5%	7.5%

PREFERENCE BY PC TYPE		
	COMPANIES WITH PCS	COMPANIES WITHOUT PCS
Desktop	52.5%	33.0%
Laptop	42.4	67.0
Both	5.1	0.0

Note: Details may not add to 100% due to rounding. Source: Sales & Marketing Management survey (Sales & Marketing Management)

Call reports and sales forecasts, each of which moved up a notch from last year, were next in line on the popularity scale. One consumer goods company used call reports as a device to hook representatives into using newly issued PCs. Reveals the marketing vice president: "We told them they were free to use or ignore the machines. However, we required all call reports to be filed on their PCs for weekly transmission to the branch office. We figured that once they saw how the PC simplified that chore, they would be encouraged to use it in other areas."

The uptick in sales forecasting software is due to the increased emphasis companies place on bottoms-up forecasts as compared to the top-down species. The president of a magazine representative firm points to the "discipline of forecasting software, where guesses are replaced by hard numbers." The general manager of an aviation products concern thinks the PC results in "better organization of the information needed to make a viable forecast."

Understandably, desktops are by far the machine of choice among marketers (see Table 3). That's because when companies first placed PCs in sales departments they favored the same type of desktop they had used for years in front offices and at headquarters. Also, laptops did not become a serious contender in the sales area until recently, when technological advances—primarily readable screens and hard disk drives—made them viable tools for salespeople.

Significantly, while laptops increased their penetration from 7.2% to 9.0% among all respondents to our survey, they almost doubled their presence in the largest firms, from 5.9% to 10.7%. Furthermore, those firms that have not yet adopted sales force automation indicate by a whopping 2:1 margin that if they decide to try PCs, they will most likely use laptops.

"I'm not convinced salesmen are really productive with PCs—and I'm an avid PC user myself."

WINNING OVER THE OPPOSITION

Despite the overwhelming vote of confidence marketers give PCs, there's still a cadre of "show-me" recalcitrants. Interestingly, resistance does not correlate to the size of the sales force. While well over 9 of every 10 larger firms participating in the survey use PCs, slightly better than 8 out of 10 small firms have given PCs to their salespeople. The lowest rate of adoption, less than 3 out of 4, is among medium-size firms.

Costs dwarf all other objections among the holdouts, mentioned more than twice as often as the next closest concern, lack of knowledge, 39% vs. 18%. Next in line, "no perceived need," is cited by 13%.

Aside from claiming that costs of hardware, software, implementation, and training are too high, others point to "lack of funding" or "no cost justification."

The need for more educational efforts by computer vendors is underscored by the remarks of several survey respondents. "There is a dearth of computer knowledge among top management," says one sales director. An executive vice president, sales and marketing, admits, "We don't have enough in-house knowledge."

The third largest group of holdouts doubt that PCs apply to their operations. "There is no apparent need as yet," argues the sales manager of an apparel accessories firm. The operations manager of an entertainment products outfit contends that "because of the lack of appropriate programs, we haven't seen any need up to now."

A managerial-type offshoot of the popular computer phobia attributed to salespeople is another deterrent. "The sales force is paid to sell, not become computer operators," the sales director of a specialty chemicals outfit contends. "Any information they need, I can provide to them on a weekly basis. I'm not convinced they're really productive with PCs—and I'm an avid PC user myself."

If PCs have friends like that in the marketing community, who will plead their case against the critics? The users, that's who. □